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The Philby Conspiracy

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INSTALLMENT 1

"THREE SPIES"

Western visitors to Moscow, exploring the city in the first mild warmth of a Russian summer, can expect sometimes to come across a stocky, middle-aged man walking briskly across Dzerzinsky Sq. They will know, as tourists, that this is the square named after Feliks Dzerzinsky, Lenin's dreaded secret-police boss of the twenties. Today the square is the place where the KGB, the Committee for State Security, has its offices. And if the visitors know anything of the reputation of the KGB, they will probably feel a certain chilly unease.

What to make of the man? At first sight, he appears to be a Russian. He swells slightly over his waistband in the comfortable style of prosperous Muscovites. He wears a Russian-looking suit of somewhat baggy cut, with a woollen sports-shirt without a tie. If spoken to, he will answer in Russian.

AND YET THERE could be a hint of something western about him: A pair of suede boots that look English, a whiff of French tobacco (he likes to smoke Gauloises sometimes). If anyone should follow him, which is probably not a wise procedure, he would be seen to enter the KGB building as an obvious habitue. But sometimes, very oddly, he carries an airmail edition of The Times, and if it happens to be the cricket season, he may pause to turn to the sports pages and check up on the county or test cricket results. An Englishman who looks like a Russian? A Russian who behaves like an Englishman? In either case, he is a man who can walk into the headquarters of the Soviet Union's secret police and espionage organization. And when this man meets a western visitor by appointment he carries a pistol in his briefcase and is "covered" by watchful Russian bodyguards.

The Anglo-Russian is Harold Adrian Russell Philby, known more usually as Kim Philby, born 56-years ago in British India, and now a citizen of the Soviet Union. The nature of his career can be spelt out swiftly in a list of his titles and decorations: Order of the Red Banner (USSR), Red Cross of Military Merit (Franco Spain), Order of the British Empire, civil division (withdrawn), member of the Athenaeum (struck off), former Director of the counter-Soviet section of the British Secret Intelligence Service (MI 6), formerly liaison officer between the service and the American Central Intelligence Agency (with an "astronomical security clearance), and now openly an officer of the KGB espionage service. He worked for 30 years under cover in the West, and for five of those years was one of the most destructively successful agents in the shadowy history of espionage. It is now known that during the whole period when he worked at the center of the western intelligence community, he made no move without first referring it to his Soviet masters.

AT THE HEIGHT of Philby's career, every western intelligence initiative was doomed before it began. For the agents he sent into ambushes, the results are known and measurable: Usually death, sometimes imprisonment. For the nations and governments who were betrayed, the results are harder to assess. The secret intelligence battles of the Cold War, in which Philby was able to strike so many powerful blows for the Russians, were part of a confrontation between East and West which still continues, if in a modified form. It is too early to strike a profit-and-loss account.

Our work began as an inquiry into the career of Philby alone. But we soon found that his career was inextricably linked with those of Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean, also Soviet espionage agents, and his contemporaries at Cambridge in the early thirties. We have therefore tried to investigate and explain the three careers together, while concentrating on Philby, as the most dangerous and effective agent of the three.

The child was born of British parents in the dusty contonmnet of Ambala in the Punjab on New Year's Day, 1912. Burnt brown by the sun, he could himself have passed as an Indian; he spoke Hindi before English. The boy had been sonorously named Harold Adrian Russell Philby but he was nicknamed "Kim," after the hero of Kipling's novel — with whom he shared certain characteristics. The Philby family took their names seriously. The father, who when Kim was born had been five years in the service, was himself christened Harry St. John Bridger. Later he deserted India, his first passion, for Arabia and began a lifelong love affair with the country and its peoples. Then he started to call himself Abdullah, "slave of God," to which he added Al Hajji, the honorific title to which Muslims who have made the pilgrimage to Mecca are entitled. The son settled for plain "Kim" and the name stuck with him through the rest of his life.

EARLY IN LIFE Kim developed a stammer; he was a silent, self-contained and introverted boy. People thought his cantankerous father bullied him when he was at home in the family's London house at 18 Acol Rd., Hampstead, in intervals between wandering round the more barren areas of the Arabian desert. In any case St. John only made spasmodic visits to London; he was far too busy with his travels. Kim's dominant influence was his mother Dora, a pleasant, very domesticated woman whose personality tended to be overshadowed by her husband, but who blossomed in his absence. There were three other children, Helena, Patricia and Diana. The boy was brought up in a house full of women and he found it agreeable; he was to re-create this situation constantly in his adult life.

Academically, he was not thought by his friends to be outstanding. On the other hand it seemed that the quiet boy with the stammer was ideal Indian Civil Service material: the family were keen that he should follow this career and Kim in his taciturn way seemed happy at the prospect. The boy lacked his father's eccentric independence and compelling personality but, it was thought, these very deficiencies might be no bad thing as far as the ICS was concerned. One St. John was enough for the family. In October, 1929, Kim went up to Trinity College, Cambridge, to read history preparatory to taking the Civil Service examination. The thick-set, untidy lad was nearly 18 but he looked more like a schoolboy than an undergraduate.

By contrast, a fellow Trinity historian, Guy Francis de Moncy Burgess, gave an impression of having been born a sophisticate. At 17 his passions were Proust, Firbank and the glittering Michael Arlen. He also admired Cezanne and had a talent, which he never really developed, for dashing off satirical and sometimes obscene drawings.

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